

12-1-2001

A Story in a Scrapbook

Ann Johnson Barton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag>



Part of the [Genealogy Commons](#), and the [Scandinavian Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Barton, Ann Johnson (2001) "A Story in a Scrapbook," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 21 : No. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol21/iss4/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Swedish American Genealogist* by an authorized editor of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

A Story in a Scrapbook

Ann Johnson Barton*

Andrew Johnson seemed destined to become a farmer. Although he was but ten years old when he emigrated from Skede Parish, Jönköping *län*, in 1870, his future was unclouded. All but one member of the family of eight children would come to the New World to improve their lot as farmers.¹

Father John Peterson had owned a small farm in Sweden, but three successive years of drought had eliminated all hope of supporting his large family. He arrived in Moline, Illinois, on the Fourth of July, 1870, anxious to play out his American dream. After three years of labor at the John Deere Company, John Peterson had sufficient funds to send for his wife and two daughters in Sweden. Another three years' wages from Deere produced the resources to construct and plant a homestead farm in Nebraska.²

Andrew was the youngest member of the family. After helping his father develop his Polk County, Nebraska, homestead, Andrew acquired his own 80 acres of farmland directly across the road from the Peterson property.³ His career as a farmer was launched. Twenty-year-old Andrew continued to live with his parents, for he had bought land from the Union Pacific Railroad, which placed no residency requirements on its purchasers.

By the fall of 1884, Andrew Johnson saw an opportunity to redirect his life. He enrolled at Luther Academy in Wahoo, Nebraska, as a member of the first graduating class, completing the three-year course in two. From there he went on to Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, where a single year's effort qualified him for admission to the Omaha (now Nebraska) Medical School. He graduated in 1890 in a class of six men and that same year he married Sophia Sandahl, a classmate at Luther Academy (see figures 1-3).

It is uncertain whether Andrew was aware of his business prowess at the time, but he appropriately chose a corporate setting for his early career. The Union Pacific Railroad medical department employed him as physician and

* Ann Johnson Barton resides at 78 Brook Run Lane, Stamford, CT 06905. She is a granddaughter of Dr. Andrew Johnson and the possessor of Mrs. Johnson's scrapbook. Her recent contributions to *Swedish American Genealogist* include "Revelations of a Homestead File," XXI (March 2001): 8-11 and "A Swedish-American Drama," XXI (September 2001) 160-167.

¹ John and Anna Lisa Peterson were parents of six boys and two girls: Jonas Peter, b. 15 Sept. 1843, emigr. 1869; Carl Gustaf, b. 2 Dec. 1845, emigr. 1868; Johan August, b. 26 Mar. 1848, did not emigr.; Franz Adolph, b. 7 Aug. 1850, emigr. 1870; Oskar Alfrid, b. 24 Oct. 1852, emigr. 1871; Inga Christina, b. 6 Aug. 1855, emigr. 1873; Anna Lovisa, b. 14 Jan. 1858, emigr. 1873; and Anders, b. 2 Apr. 1860, emigr. 1870. The boys all took the patronymic surname Johnson; both girls were known as Peterson.

² O. M. Nelson, *The Swedish Element in Omaha*, 2nd ed. (Omaha 1935), 62.

³ Union Pacific Railway Company contracts 28568 and 45880.

assistant surgeon. For the first three years he was based in Omaha, where son Julius was born in August 1891. He was then transferred to Hanna, Wyoming, where he took care of the men working for the Union Pacific Coal Company.⁴ Daughter Olga joined the family in July 1894.

Andrew Johnson resigned from the Union Pacific in 1898 to set up a private practice in Omaha. As an active member of the Swedish-American Republican League, his leadership and management talents were observed by members with political clout. In February 1901, Dr. Johnson was appointed superintendent of the Institute for Feeble-Minded Youth in Beatrice by newly-elected Nebraska Governor Dietrich.

When the Republicans came into office in 1901, they found most of the state institutions in deplorable repair, due in great part to political scandal. Dr. Johnson's first task was to restore order to both the deteriorated grounds and the incredible mismanagement.

He proved to be not only a competent and compassionate physician but also an efficient administrator, gifted businessman, and savvy politician as well. The Institute flourished under his guidance to such an extent that three successive governors reappointed him to the position of superintendent. Because the Institute was government funded, numerous surprise inspections by members of legislative committees were made and reported upon to the press. So much favorable publicity did Dr. Johnson receive that Mrs. Johnson was inspired to collect those newspaper articles relating to her husband's institutional career. Her scrapbook is extant today and is the basis for the following testimonials.⁵

To set the scene for Dr. Johnson's arrival at the Institute for Feeble-Minded Youth, one newspaper reporter observed, "When Dr. Johnson first appeared in Beatrice, he had a heart-breaking task before him. The Institution was badly run down as a result of political intrigues, scandals, friction, neglect, and general mismanagement. The grounds were in such wretched condition that they looked like second-rate cow pastures."

Andrew Johnson was apparently undaunted by the task at hand. He planted 3,000 shade trees, hundreds of fruit trees, and laid 5,000 square feet of brick and cement walks. He developed a 225-acre farm with 55 head of cattle, 30 milk cows, and 8 horses. The vegetable cellar he contracted for was capable of holding 2,500 pounds of produce. He built a cold storage building, a green house, and a blacksmith shop, and installed a new boiler. Of the farm it was written, "The superintendent, having lived on a farm, has practical knowledge of farming, and is thus enabled to plan the crops, to introduce and give direction to the farm machinery, to the stock raising and to labor."

⁴Nelson, *Swedish Element*, 62.

⁵Unfortunately, Mrs. Johnson did not save the names or dates of the newspapers from which she clipped.

LIST OF STUDENTS.

THIRD CLASS.

Name:	Nativity:	Present Home:
<i>Gibson, Ester Cornelia,</i>	Knoxville, Ill.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Håkanson, Alfred,</i>	Geneseo, Ill.	Oakland, Neb.
<i>Johnson, Andrew,</i>	Småland, Sw.	Polk Co., Neb.
<i>Larson-Scott, Alfred,</i>	Värmland, Sw.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Lind, Richard Hiram,</i>	Chicago, Ill.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Lundholm, Emma,</i>	Småland, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Modin, Bernhard,</i>	Upland, Sw.	Omaha, Neb.
<i>Rodell, August J.,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Stenholm, Augusta,</i>	Småland, Sw.	Gowrie, Iowa.
<i>Sundean, Herman,</i>	Värmland, Sw.	Lincoln, Neb.
		Total 10.

SECOND CLASS.

Name:	Nativity:	Present Home:
<i>Anderson, Johannes A.,</i>	Brushy, Tex.	Brushy, Tex.
<i>Anderson, John N.,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Bengtson, Berndt Emil,</i>	Halland, Sw.	Hamilton Co., Neb.
<i>Bengtson, Otto Wilhelm,</i>	Småland, Sw.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Fahlin, Charles Johan,</i>	Småland, Sw.	Stanton, Iowa,
<i>Lind, John,</i>	Vestergötland, Sw.	Polk Co., Neb.
<i>Lindberg, Henry Axel,</i>	Chicago, Ill.	Saronville, Neb.
<i>Olson, Ernest William,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.
		Total 8.

FIRST CLASS.

Name:	Nativity:	Present Home:
<i>Bard, Jennie Elizabeth,</i>	La Porte, Ind.	Knox Co., Neb.
<i>Bäckström, Carl Ad. Ehraim,</i>	Upland, Sw.	Saronville, Neb.
<i>Gibson, Emma Augusta,</i>	Knoxville, Ill.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Hanson, Ernest,</i>	Saunders Co., Neb.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Henning, Nils Edward,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Heurlin, Hilda Victoria,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Johnson, Frank William,</i>	Vestergötland, Sw.	Polk Co., Neb.
<i>Larson, Anna Julia,</i>	Washington Co., Neb.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Larson, Cora Jennie,</i>	Washington Co., Neb.	Wahoo, Neb.
<i>Larson, Sena Amanda</i>	Knoxville, Ill.	Saunders Co., Neb.
<i>Larsén, Axel Theodor,</i>	Skåne, Sw.	Boone, Iowa.
<i>Person, Anna Katharina,</i>	Värmland, Sw.	Saunders Co., Neb.

Fig. 1. Students at Luther Academy, Wahoo, Nebraska, 1885-86. Andrew Johnson is listed under the heading "Third Class."

20

Augustana College and Theological Seminary.

	Born.	Arr. in U. S.	
Reck, Warren H.....	'71.....	—.....	Rock Island, Ill.
Swanberg, Gustaf A.....	'57.....	'67.....	Dayton, Iowa.
Swensson, Swen E.....	'62.....	'69.....	Sparta, Mich.
			Sophomores.....24.

FRESHMAN CLASS.

Guardian, Prof. G. W. SANDT.

Custos, K. A. MARTIN.

Vice Custos, C. E. OLSSON.

CLASSICAL COURSE.

	Born.	Arr. in U. S.	
Appell, Alfred.....	1863.....	—.....	Galva, Ill.
Beckman, S. Noah.....	'67.....	'69.....	Geneva, Ill.
Bergendoff, C. August.....	'61.....	'82.....	Boston, Mass.
Bohman, Carl A.....	'70.....	—.....	Lake View, Ill.
Chindblom, Carl R.....	'70.....	—.....	Chicago, Ill.
Fletwood, G.....	'61.....	'80.....	Burlington, Iowa.
Gustus, Carl N.....	'69.....	—.....	Moline, Ill.
Hegstrom, V. Harald.....	'69.....	'84.....	Chicago, Ill.
Johansson, J. August.....	'63.....	'80.....	Lindsborg, Kans.
Larson, Martin L.....	'64.....	'78.....	Galesburgh, Ill.
Martin, K. Axel.....	'63.....	'81.....	Andover, Ill.
Olsson, C. Emil.....	'66.....	'69.....	Andover, Ill.
Scott, Alfred L.....	'62.....	'82.....	Wahoo, Neb.
Swenson, Frank.....	'59.....	—.....	Humboldt, Kans.

SELECT COURSE.

Edman, Carl J.....	'60.....	'80.....	Centre City, Minn.
Hokanson, Alfred.....	'66.....	—.....	Edgar, Neb.
Högberg, August H.....	'60.....	'86.....	Rock Island, Ill.
Johnson, Andrew.....	'60.....	'70.....	Swede Home, Neb.
Kohler, Axel G. H.....	'71.....	—.....	Moline, Ill.
*Lindahl, Christian A.....	'61.....	'75.....	Alta, Iowa.
Luckey, J. Eddy.....	'66.....	—.....	Rock Island, Ill.
Modin, Bernhard.....	'63.....	'80.....	Omaha, Neb.
Ristrom, Gustaf.....	'59.....	'84.....	San José, Cal.
Youngerth, S. G.....	'61.....	'86.....	Rock Island, Ill.

Freshman..... 24.

* Absent this year.

Fig. 2. Freshman students at Augustana College and Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois, 1886-87. Andrew Johnson, from Swede Home, Nebraska, is the fourth student listed under the heading "Select Course."

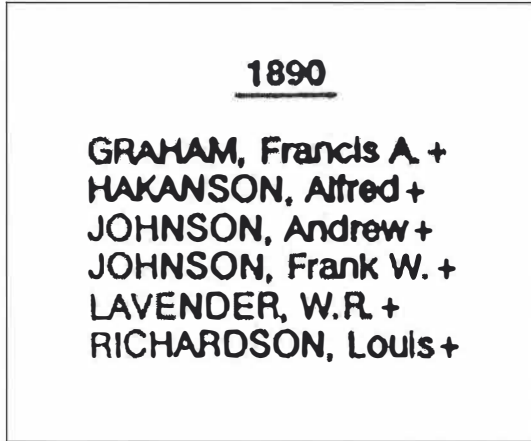


Fig. 3. List of 1890 graduates of the Omaha (now Nebraska) Medical School on file at the Alumni Affairs Office, University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska.

Approximately 350 “inmates,” as they were called, lived permanently at the Institute, which supported a staff of forty. The term “youth” was a bit of a euphemism, for although only feeble-minded children between the ages of five and eighteen could enroll at the Institute, most who came stayed for the rest of their lives. There was no cure for feeble-mindedness, but with compassion and the proper training, the residents were often able to lead happy and satisfying lives.

In less than four years after his arrival in Beatrice, Dr. Johnson was recognized as an authority on mental disease.⁶ That Dr. Johnson was qualified to provide the appropriate direction to those in his care was echoed by a number of state legislators who visited the Institute and made their findings known to the local newspapers. Of the general state of the facility, one politician reported succinctly, “The Institution for Feeble-Minded Youth is one of the State’s model institutions.”

Another was quoted as saying, “The Institute for Feeble-Minded Youth is doing truly admirable work under the superintendency of a gentleman who is admirably fitted for it, both by education and by sympathy. No man can doubt his perfect fitness for the place after visiting the institution and noting the splendid system that prevails in every department. The children meet nothing but kindness from those in authority.”

⁶ “The Saturday Summary,” Beatrice, Nebraska, Vol. 1, No. 37, Nov. 19, 1904. This issue was subtitled “The Beatrice Institute Illustrated,” 4.

Dr. Johnson was regularly commended for keeping expenses within his appropriations. This was achieved in no small part through his use of the inmates' manual labor on both the farm and in the residences. Only one man was employed to supervise the farm. All the labor was supplied by the older boys of the Institute who were said to enjoy the outdoor work and to find satisfaction in their toil. And, of course, the produce from the farm and the fruit orchard fed the nearly 400 people associated with the Institute. Similarly, the girls took their turn with the cleaning, dishes, mending, embroidery, and pottery making.⁷ With this effective approach to the practical work requirements of the institution, the per capita expense was confined to \$30 per year—the least of any of the state institutions for the infirm.

It wasn't all work for the inmates, however. They had their academic classes, music lessons, and programs for each of the major holidays. In the latter category, Mrs. Johnson was particularly active. She organized marches, bands, recitations, and recitals, giving all the inmates who were able a chance to be recognized and complimented.⁸

Mrs. Johnson was a popular and untiring helpmate to her husband. She had charge of the kitchen, with responsibility for planning all meals and making requisitions for all kitchen supplies. She purchased all the bedding, the materials for the sewing room, and the girls' clothing, while Dr. Johnson personally bought for all the boys.⁹ Mrs. Johnson touched each "child," actively promoting the social development of the inmates, lovingly nurturing their limited talents, and helping to feed and dress those who were physically incapacitated. Her invaluable contributions were recognized by the state governors who appointed her, along with her husband, to attend the National Conference of Charities and Correction on three separate occasions (see figure 4).¹⁰

After seven years at the Institute, and with confidence that this state facility was running smoothly, Dr. Johnson resigned to resume his private practice in Omaha. In the evenings, he was a medical examiner for the Scandia Life Insurance Company. He built a new house and his children attended public school.

In 1910, however, he was tapped again to salvage a state institution. Governor-elect Aldrich appointed him to the superintendency of the Norfolk [Nebraska] Hospital for the Insane. Although this institution also required substantial renovations to the buildings and grounds, Dr. Johnson had a different medical challenge with those in his care than at Beatrice. For whereas a feeble-minded child was given no hope of cure, patients committed to an insane asylum could potentially be restored to usefulness and to society.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁸ Mrs. Johnson saved menus and programs for holiday festivities in her scrapbook.

⁹ "The Saturday Summary" 5.

¹⁰ Mrs. Johnson's scrapbook contains letters of invitation from the governors and certificates of attendance for conferences in Atlanta (1903), Portland, Ore. (1905), and Minneapolis (1907).

STATE OF NEBRASKA
EXECUTIVE OFFICE
LINCOLN

May 28, 1907

Dr. and Mrs. A. Johnson,

Beatrice, Nebraska.

Dear Sir and Madam:-

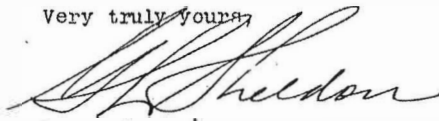
I have the honor to appoint you as delegates to represent Nebraska at the coming meeting of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, to be held in Minneapolis, Minn., June 12 to 19, 1907.

This letter will serve as your formal commission.

If you wish to ascertain the names of your colleagues you will doubtless find the entire list in the daily papers of May 28 or 29.

I hope you can make it convenient to attend.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. Sheldon".

Governor.

Fig. 4. Letter from Governor Sheldon appointing Dr. and Mrs. A. Johnson as Nebraska's delegates to the National Conference of Charities and Correction held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 12-19, 1907.

Dr. Johnson was in the forefront of new treatments. He and his first assistant visited hospitals in other states that were successfully using hydrotherapy. Although this treatment was unknown in other Nebraska state institutions, Dr. Johnson determined that it would be an asset in Norfolk. One of the Norfolk nurses was sent to Watertown, Illinois, for training in the use of the new equipment. The baths were given primarily to disturbed and violent patients who were invariably calmed after just a few treatments. Dr. Johnson proclaimed the effect of the baths to be far more desirable than that from the use of drugs.

During Dr. Johnson's tenure, entertainment became a vital part of life at the Norfolk Hospital. A movie was shown every Tuesday afternoon and dances were scheduled for each Friday evening. Religious services were held Sunday afternoons, with local preachers taking turns in the pulpit.

At Dr. Johnson's suggestion, the hospital leased a 40-acre orchard nearby. The patients were allowed to pick and eat all the fruit they wanted. The orchard also provided fruit for the dining tables and extra revenue for the state hospital. When Dr. Johnson proposed to the state legislature that the orchard be purchased for the permanent use of the hospital, \$7,500 was appropriated without dispute.

The newspaper reports on the conditions at Norfolk were as flattering and prodigious as those relating to Dr. Johnson's experience in Beatrice. One state committeeman who arrived in Norfolk unexpectedly at dinner time found both Dr. and Mrs. Johnson assisting the nurses in serving and feeding the patients. The press covered his favorable impressions. Another legislator told a reporter, "I wish every state institution was as efficiently managed and that every ward of the state was receiving the treatment being accorded the Norfolk inmates." When the Norfolk Commercial Club toured the hospital, its members found it "so clean you could eat off the floor of the mammoth institution."

By 1919 Dr. Johnson was ready to move on again. He accepted the position of medical director and secretary of the Lutheran International Insurance Company in Moline, Illinois,¹¹ and he and Sophia purchased a home in that city in her name. The Andrew Johnsons joined the Zion Lutheran Church of Rock Island and were active in Swedish-American groups. They were invited to several social functions honoring Swedish royalty visiting in Rock Island. Mrs. Johnson's scrapbook then became a repository for engraved invitations bearing the names of princes and princesses (see figure 5).

¹¹ Dr. Johnson was rapidly promoted to the office of vice president, a position he held at his death in 1927. The company was acquired by the Crescent Life Insurance Company of Indianapolis, where Andrew Johnson lived the last six months of his life.

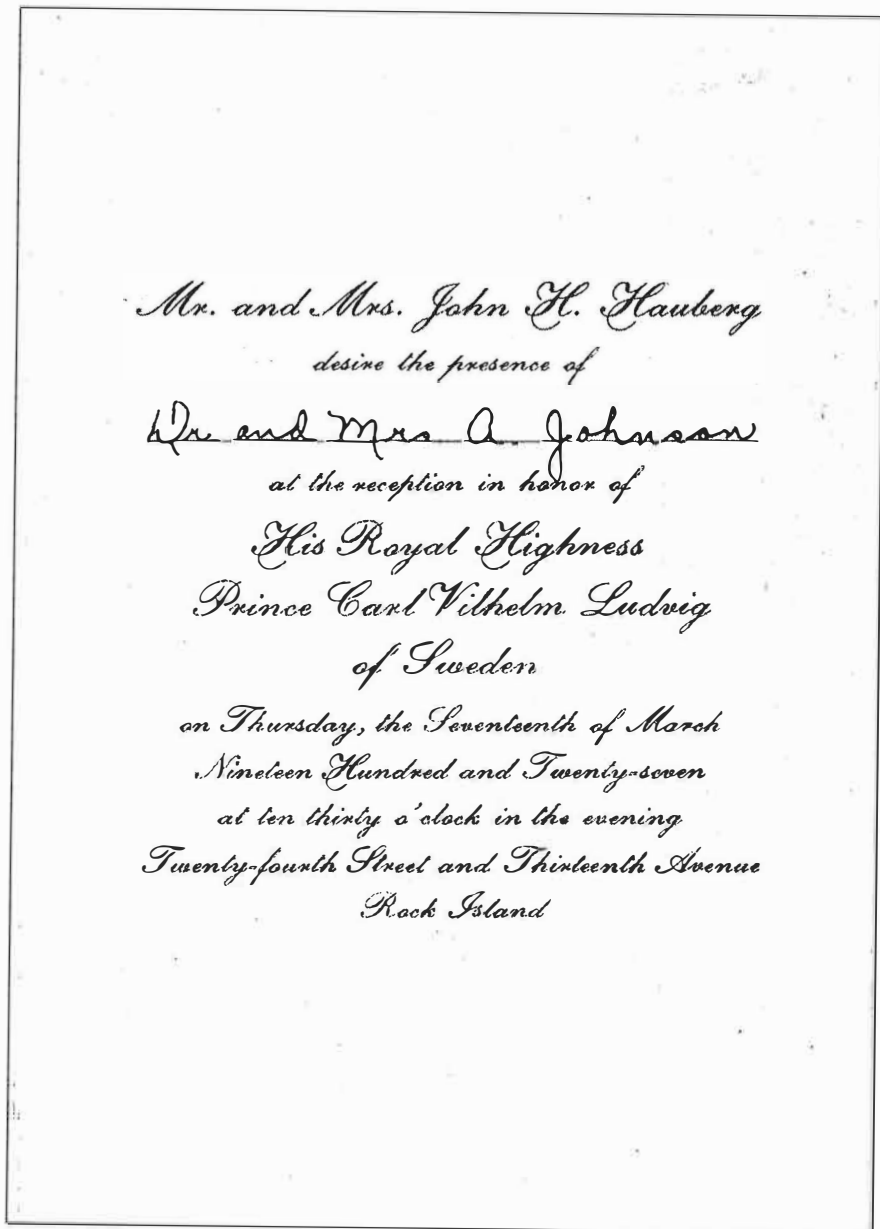


Fig. 5. Invitation to meet His Royal Highness Prince Carl Vilhelm Ludvig of Sweden at a reception given in Rock Island, Illinois, on 17 March 1927.